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Two Paths | Proverbs 1:8-33 Sermon

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Have you ever taken a wrong turn? If you have a smart phone, wrong turns should be less and less common. If you have Google or Apple Maps or Waze you should never miss a turn, and yet sometimes we still do. When I get to the place my GPS says to turn it's not as clear as my phone says it should be. The off-ramps merge into two lanes going generally the same direction and you have to guess which one to take, the left or right. Once when Monica and I were driving on I90 we missed an exit and the next option was ten miles away. A wrong turn can cost you significant time and energy.

Today I want to explain how not to take a wrong turn in your walk with God. I want to tell you about two paths, one that leads to life and the other death, and I'm hoping Lord willing by the end of today's message we will know how to take the right turn. I'm hoping there won't be any confusion about the pathway. God offers each of us a clear way forward that leads to eternal life with him. Now the first seven chapters of the book of Proverbs are written to "my son." A son figure is being presented with a choice.

"My son" - Presented with a choice. (v8-9)

This does not mean Proverbs is only written to young men. It's written to whoever wants to read and learn. Anyone can pick up and read a copy of the *Hunger Games*, but it's young adult fiction. Likewise Proverbs is written with young men in mind. It's written with an ideal father and mother giving advice to their son. Usually it's the father who speaks but here we see both father and mother offering parental wisdom.

> **Proverbs 1:8-9**
> 8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
> and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
> 9 They are a garland to grace your head
> and a chain to adorn your neck. (NIV)

What does the father do? He presents his son with two paths, the way of folly and the way of wisdom. If you keep a two-paths framework in mind as we read the book of Proverbs it will make things simpler as we will often encounter a contrast, "choose this, not that."

> **Proverbs 28:10**
> Whoever leads the upright along an evil path
> will fall into their own trap,
> but the blameless will receive a good inheritance.

Here we see that contrast between a bad path and good path. Together the father and mother urge their son to stay away from the evil path, the way of the foolish.

Path #1 - The way of the foolish (v10-19)

The way of the foolish is a life lived against God and for oneself. Proverbs unashamedly calls anyone who rejects God a "fool" because the final consequence is death. In today's Proverb the father warns the son of a specific type of fool—the type who is willing to take advantage of others for their own gain.

Proverbs 1:10-11, 15-16, 18-19

10 My son, if sinful men entice you,
do not give in to them.
11 If they say, "Come along with us;
let's lie in wait for innocent blood,
let's ambush some harmless soul; […]

15 my son, do not go along with them,
do not set foot on their paths;
16 for their feet rush into evil,
they are swift to shed blood. […]

18 These men lie in wait for their own blood;
they ambush only themselves!
19 Such are the paths of all who go after ill-gotten gain;
it takes away the life of those who get it.

So here's the point our proverb is making. Don't take advantage of others and avoid those who do. Those who do are sinful men, evil men, and even though in the short-term their decisions seem good in the end their actions will prove harmful, even destructive, to themselves and any who join them.

In Proverbs one, the father is essentially warning his son not to join a gang. Now the likelihood of most of us being recruited by the Crips or the Bloods or the Jets or the Sharks is pretty low. But we do regularly encounter a way of thinking that says to take care of "me and my own first" and that way of thinking comes at the expense of others.

- Has your friend ever told you to steal that candy or toy or outfit from the store because it'll be awesome? *That's the way of the fool*.
- Has your classmate ever told you to copy their homework or asked if they could copy yours even though that won't help you learn? *That's the way of the fool*.
- Has your college buddy ever encouraged you to take advantage of that guy or that girl that likes you. *That's the way of the fool*.
- Have you ever been tempted to sell a car or lawnmower on Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace and not inform the potential buyer of some of its problems? *That's the way of the fool*.
- On your frontline, has your supervisor or coworker ever told you to cover up a mistake at the expense of your company's client? *That's the way of the fool*.

Proverbs is here to guide us like a GPS that never leads us wrong. We're all presented with choices in this life. Don't make the wrong turn. *Avoid path #1, the way of the foolish*. But is there any alternative? Proverbs two actually tells us about another path.

Proverbs 2:12-13

12 Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,
from men whose words are perverse,
13 who have left the straight paths
to walk in dark ways,

God invites us to walk in the way of wisdom, the second path.

Path #2 - The way of the wise (v20-33)

In my Proverbs 1:1-7 sermon, I defined wisdom ("hokmah) as "the skill of living." But it's not just living any way you want. It's living "for God." It's living life in a way that honors God and is according to his plan and not our own. We live for God by believing in God, respecting him, obeying him, and having a relationship with him. Proverbs calls this "the fear of the Lord."

Now if you were a father and wanted to have a lengthy conversation with your son about wisdom you might do some creative things to hold your son's attention on the topic of wisdom. Maybe you would personify wisdom. Maybe you would describe wisdom as a courageous, smart, and engaging woman—just to help hold your teenage boy's interest. "Son, have I got just the girl for you. Her name is wisdom and she is hot!" And that's what we see in Proverbs.

> **Proverbs 1:20-21**
> 20 Out in the open wisdom calls aloud,
> she raises her voice in the public square;
> 21 on top of the wall she cries out,
> at the city gate she makes her speech:

This girl is completely different than the way of the wicked. She's not hiding in ambush. She's out in the open bravely calling out in the "public square." The ESV translates "public square" as "markets." This is the marketplace. This is the broad open plaza where business and government and news happen. Wisdom offers her good path to everyone in every part of life.

Remember how I said the foolish take advantage of others for their own gain. If that's path number one, then you would expect that path number two, the way of wisdom, offers a positive alternative. I want to play a 2-minute clip highlighting a company and one of its employees that has the opportunity to take advantage of others and is instead choosing path #2 - the way of the wise. From this video we see a company trying to avoid the way of the foolish and walk in the way of the wise.

What's one way you can walk in the way of the wise this week? What's one way you can follow lady wisdom? It might not look like the professional from the clip, but what does it look like in your context?

Lady wisdom does not withdraw out of fear for her own safety but boldly enters into the public square so that any can enter into a relationship with her. That's just like God, isn't it? Through Jesus God enters into our world full of brokenness and sin in order to bring us into right relationship with himself. I believe that wisdom is a personification or metaphor for God. A metaphor is figure of speech, a word picture. Wisdom is a picture of God himself entering into our world to bring us closer to him. Why else in the next two verses would we need to repent unless by disobeying wisdom we are disobeying God?

> **Proverbs 1:22-23**
> 22 "How long will you who are simple love your simple ways?
> How long will mockers delight in mockery
> and fools hate knowledge?
> 23 Repent at my rebuke!
> Then I will pour out my thoughts to you,
> I will make known to you my teachings.

Wisdom is the ideal girl any parent would want their son to marry. But wisdom is also a picture of God. Wisdom can be two things at once because this is poetry. It doesn't fit perfectly into a neat diagram. But that doesn't mean there's no limits. Just because wisdom is a metaphor for God doesn't mean that wisdom is God. Wisdom is a characteristic or attribute of God. Some people have taken the Greek word for wisdom, "sophia" and said "Sophia is God," so we can worship and pray and sing to the goddess Sophia, the fourth person of the Trinity. That's heresy. That's a lie and that's <u>not what I am saying</u>. What I'm trying to say is that wisdom is a symbolic image of God through which we are called to be in relationship with him.

This is serious stuff because there are consequences if we choose to reject wisdom. If we reject wisdom, if we choose not to live the way God designed us to live, we reject God himself and God promises that one day there will come a judgment.

> **Proverbs 1:24-26**
> 24 But since you refuse to listen when I call
> and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand,
> 25 since you disregard all my advice
> and do not accept my rebuke,
> 26 I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you;
> I will mock when calamity overtakes you—

This isn't a cruel laugh, but a laugh of goodness defeating evil. It's the laughter of a child finding a safe and loving forever home. It's the laughter of an office Christmas party celebrating a record year because they did it right—they served their customers and employees and community well. It's the laughter of the innocent person declared not guilty at their trial. It's the laughter of Allied soldiers defeating Hitler and coming home to be with their families. Wisdom and goodness will overthrow sin and it will be good.

Jesus taught there were two paths, one leading to life and the other death.

> **Matthew 7:13-14**
> "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

If you want to walk the road to life, you need to enter into a relationship with wisdom by entering into a relationship with God. We can only do this through Jesus Christ. None of us can walk the wisdom highway perfectly. We all stumble and fall into the way of the foolish. That's why we need a Savior. That's why we need someone who our Heavenly Father calls, "my Son!" Jesus is the Son who actually did all the things Proverbs calls us to do. He was perfectly wise. Perfectly obedient. He was the perfect embodiment of God's wisdom (Proverbs 8:22-31; Colossians 1:15-17). If you repent of your sins and believe in him, the perfect Son, God will grant you eternal life. When God counts up your life he'll count Christ's wise record instead of our foolish records. Listen to how the last verse ends.

> **Proverbs 1:33**
> but whoever listens to me will live in safety
> and be at ease, without fear of harm."

God offers refuge in himself. There is safety in wisdom because there is safety in God. No one can steal you from him, not even yourself. So which path will you choose? Path #1 - The way of the foolish, which leads to death? Or Path #2 - The way of the wise, which leads to eternal life? Which way have you been living? If you've been living the way of the fool, Christ invites you to repent and he will forgive you. God invites. you into a relationship with him through his Son Jesus Christ. *I hope you'll choose to walk the path of life with God. I hope you'll choose Jesus.*

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA on June 22, 2019 when he served there as pastor. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon at archive.org or read an online version on Substack.

Discussion Questions

Questions for small groups, Bible studies, or personal devotionals:

1. What's a decision you found hard to make? What did you do?
2. What is the way of the foolish?
3. What is the way of the wise?
4. How does Jesus show us the way?
5. What do you need wisdom for this week? Pray over it.

Resource Recommendations

Some of the following are affiliate links, which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We also recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

How To Read Proverbs (affiliate link) by Tremper Longman III

The Book of Proverbs by BibleProject

Proverbs Sermon Series

Go through the Proverbs with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series: Everyday Wisdom

Endnotes

The mother also offers wisdom. See Proverbs 6:20; 10:1; 15:20; 29:15; 31:1

"Your Frontline is the place where you spend the majority of your time outside the church, where you are in contact with non-Christians." – Life on the Frontline (licc.org.uk)

See also the next two verses:

> 14 who delight in doing wrong
> and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,
> 15 whose paths are crooked
> and who are devious in their ways.

How to Read Proverbs by Tremper Longman III. Page 14.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

Watch the sermon on YouTube.